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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN NIGERIA HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE JAN TO APR
2006

¶1. This is a roundup of various recent incidents representative of the human rights situation in southern Nigeria. This summary is organized according to the sections of the annual Human Right Report. These incidents have not been reported in other cables or are updates of previously reported items.

Section 1 - Respect for the Integrity of the Person

¶2. On January 10, policemen killed two suspected robbers in the Rivers State capital city of Port Harcourt. A police spokesperson said the robbers, dressed in fake army uniforms, robbed several people before they were killed by the police. We do not know if the police officers first attempted to use non-lethal force to subdue the purported robbers prior to the resort to lethal force.

¶3. In February, there were outbreaks of religious violence in the Northern cities of Kano and Maiduguri, following protests against the Denmark publication of caricatures of Prophet Muhammed. Reprisal killings against Muslims and Northerners followed in the southern, predominantly Christian city of Onitsha. The Christian Association of Nigeria said at least 50 people were killed in the violence in the North, and on February 21, hundreds of youths in Onitsha killed as many as 100 Muslims in retaliation. Violence expanded to the southern city of Enugu and the northern city of Kontagora.

¶4. On April 10, seven students were killed during clashes among three rival cult groups at the Ambrose Alli University in Edo State. University authorities confirmed the incident, and said the police have commenced investigation to unravel the cause of the clash.

¶5. On April 19, two people were killed when a car exploded at a military base in Port Harcourt. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for the explosion and stated that the explosion at the military base was to send a signal to the Nigerian military forces that there was little they could do to stop MEND's campaign in the Niger Delta. Police investigation is still on-going in Port Harcourt.

Section 2 - Respect for Civil Liberties

¶6. In early January, five Lagos policeman were arrested for extorting money from innocent motorists at checkpoints. Lagos State Chief of Police Adebayo christened the effort "Operation Keep Moving," a directive under which police "are not to stagnate or impede traffic by collecting money or

making unnecessary demands of motorists."

¶ 17. In January, police in Oyo State used teargas to disperse a high-profile demonstration protesting Governor Ladoja's impeachment and removal from office. Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka and other prominent anti-GON activists participated in the peaceful rally. Police claimed protestors had not, in accordance with national law, applied for a permit to demonstrate, despite the Supreme Court's judgement that the law was unconstitutional.

¶ 18. On February 21, policemen arrested and detained twenty-four civil society representatives protesting the alleged third term agenda of President Olusegun Obasanjo during a zonal constitutional review conference held in Oshogbo, the Osun State capital. Police arraigned the protestors before an Oshogbo magistrate court, again using the pretext of unlawful assembly. They were all granted bail, and the matter is still pending in court.

¶ 19. In March, an Abuja High Court granted bail on health grounds to Dr. Fredrick Fasehun, a factional leader of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC). (Note. The OPC was founded in 1997 and is a militant socio-political Yoruba nationalist group. In March 2006, the FG publicly accused the OPC of killing 10,000 people over the last seven years in acts of vigilante justice. End Note.) Fasehun is facing trial on treason charges alongside other leaders of major ethnic militia groups, including Gani Adams, OPC factional leader, Alhaji Dokubo Asari, leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and Ralph Uwazurike, leader of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). None of the others have received bail nor have they been tried.

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Section 3 - Respect for Political Rights: Citizens' Right to Change Their Government

¶ 110. On January 12, the Oyo State House of Assembly impeached Governor Rasheed Ladoja on charges of corruption and abuse of office. Underlying the impeachment was a political feud pitting the Governor against the traditional political strongman in the state. The latter enjoyed the tacit support of the Presidency. Governor Ladoja has since filed a petition in the court challenging his removal. The case is still pending in court.

¶ 111. On April 22, a by-election was held in Ekiti State to fill a vacant seat in the House of Representatives previously occupied by the Deputy Governor. The opposition Alliance for Democracy (AD) party claimed the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) colluded with election officials and police to rig the election. The AD also reported several opposition politicians were arrested and held in Abuja to ensure elections went the PDP's way. The police denied the charge and claimed those arrested had tried unlawfully to disrupt the voting exercise.

¶ 112. Outspoken opponent of the President, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu, had his assets frozen by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Section 5 - Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

¶ 113. In February, two men were arrested in Delta State for their involvement in the alleged ritual killings of children. One was arrested in possession of two human skulls, and the other was accused of battering and dismembering a ten-year-old girl.

Section 6 - Workers Rights

¶14. On February 16, the Federal Government (FG) promised a N30.5 billion (approximately \$235 million) severance package for all maritime workers. The package was promised to assuage worker anxieties over the concessioning of FG ports.

¶15. In March in Delta State, 600 workers claiming membership in the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) reportedly went on strike, stopping all municipal works for several days, over the alleged mistreatment of 3 recently appointed union-friendly local government councillors. FG workers are prohibited by law from unionizing.

¶16. The Ministry of Labor held a regional workshop in March, including labor leaders from Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Liberia. Nigerian Minister of Labor Hassan Lawal asserted the responsibility of all African countries to uphold workers rights through increased labor inspections, and he announced new training programs for labor and occupational safety inspectors.

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